



DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR

news release

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PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF CHINA, TAIWAN CITED
FOR ILLEGAL TRADE IN RHINOS, TIGERS

Prompted by evidence of continuing illegal trade in endangered rhinoceros and tiger products, Secretary of the Interior Bruce Babbitt today certified the People's Republic of China and Taiwan under the Pelly Amendment of the Fishermen's Protective Act of 1967. Certification can be the basis for a subsequent Presidential decision on whether to impose trade sanctions on products from China and Taiwan.

"The United States cannot stand by while the world's remaining wild tigers and rhinos slip into extinction as a result of illegal commercial trade in the world marketplace," said Secretary Babbitt. "Our action today will send the message that continued unlawful trade in these rare species will not be tolerated."

The world's rhinoceros population has declined by 90 percent in just over two decades to fewer than 10,000 animals. Tiger populations have dropped to fewer than 5,000, a decline of 95 percent during this century.

Information gathered by the Department's U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service indicates illegal trade in critically endangered rhino and tiger products continues, despite a warning from the United States in June that such activity could result in certification.

Under the terms of the Pelly Amendment, the Secretary of the Interior is required to issue a certification when nationals of a foreign country are engaged in trade that diminishes the effectiveness of any international conservation program for endangered or threatened species.

In a letter to U.S. Trade Representative Mickey Kantor accompanying the certification, Secretary Babbitt noted that both China and Taiwan had taken initial steps to limit trade in tiger bone and rhino horn, and asked that the imposition of trade sanctions be deferred pending further progress. Under the Pelly Amendment, the President has 60 days to notify Congress of any action taken pursuant to the certification.

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Today's certification was based on evidence that activities in the PRC and Taiwan are undermining the effectiveness of CITES, the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora. Tiger bone and rhino horn products are used in traditional Chinese medicines, and both species are protected by CITES. The availability of rhino horn on the black market leads to the illegal killing of wild rhinos in Africa and Asia. Prices for illegal rhino horn can reach \$30,000 per pound.

Secretary Babbitt sent notice to both the People's Republic of China and Taiwan warning that unless steps were taken to stop trade in rhino horn and tiger bone, the United States would issue certifications. Information compiled by the Interior Department's Fish and Wildlife Service, as well as by several non-governmental organizations, indicates that while some measures have been taken in both countries, efforts fall short of the international conservation standards of CITES.

The Service has information indicating that while China has recently outlawed trade in rhino horn and tiger bone, these products are readily available for purchase in some cities. In addition, China has opposed implementing CITES resolutions calling for destruction of rhino horn stocks, thus hindering efforts to keep these stocks off the illegal market.

Taiwan has banned all international and domestic trade in rhino horn and tiger bone and has destroyed some government-held stocks. However, the Service noted that Taiwan's enforcement of its wildlife conservation law is not sufficiently effective and penalties for violations are weak.

"The United States stands ready to assist China and Taiwan in moving toward compliance with CITES standards," Babbitt said. The Secretary offered trade and law enforcement technical assistance and guidance to help achieve those standards.

China and Taiwan, along with South Korea and Yemen, were subjects of the original petition for certification from the World Wildlife Fund and the National Wildlife Federation. Because South Korea will soon become a member of CITES and has demonstrated a strong intent to eliminate illegal trade, Secretary Babbitt withheld a decision on certification at this time, but the country will be monitored very closely for illegal trade activity.

A decision on Yemen was also withheld. That country recently stated its intent to join CITES and has taken measures resulting in substantial declines in illegal trade. However, monitoring efforts will continue there also.